Too Late to Realize It Was Love

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Too Late to Realize It Was Love

by MilkyLatte_097

Summary

“I’m sorry,” Till whispered, his voice shaking. “I’m so, so sorry.”

He sat there for hours, staring straight at Ivan's photo, replaying every moment they’d shared, every chance he’d missed, every word left unsaid.

He thought of the time he finally knew the disease that killed Ivan. The journals that he had read through night after night. The emotions that bubbled relentlessly in his heart as he dreams of the man—the most important person in his life, his Ivan.

Till always believed he understood Ivan better than anyone. The two of them had been inseparable since childhood—partners in mischief, confidants, and each other's anchor. Ivan's moods, quirks, and habits were all familiar to him, like the back of his hand.

Or so he thought.

Now, as Till sat on the large queen-size bed of Ivan's room, cradling his best friend's lifeless body, he realized how blind he had been.

The stillness of Ivan's face, so often animated with mischief or veiled with exasperation, now seemed unbearable. His usually warm skin felt ice-cold under Till's trembling hands, and the lifeless weight of his body pressed into Till's arms like a cruel reminder of everything Till had failed to see.

The note lay on the bedside table, its words hauntingly simple:

[I'm sorry. Please don't blame yourself.]

But Till did blame himself. How could he not?

The questions churned in his head, relentless and unforgiving. The cold, unmoving form of the person he thought he knew better than anyone else pressed against him, and yet Ivan had been a stranger all along.

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Their relationship had been easy, effortless. Ivan never complained when Till barged into his room uninvited, never told him to stop when Till dragged him to late-night drives or spontaneous adventures.

Till took it all for granted—the camaraderie, the quiet trust, the unspoken bond that always tethered them together.

But Ivan had been good at hiding things, hadn't he?

The first time Till noticed something was off, Ivan had brushed it away with a grin.

"Just tired," he'd said, waving off Till's concern like it was nothing.

Till had believed him.

Why wouldn't he?

Aside from Mizi, Ivan was always the next person in charge in holding their group together. The one cracking jokes and lightening the mood when things got too serious. He never faltered, never showed weakness. Till had thought it was just who Ivan was.

But then there were other signs. The days Ivan had skipped meals, claiming he wasn't hungry. The nights Till heard muffled coughing from the other side of the apartment. The way Ivan had started avoiding his eyes when Till asked if he was okay.

Looking back, Till wondered if he had chosen not to see the truth.

Maybe he hadn't wanted to acknowledge that his best friend—the person who had been by his side through everything—was slipping away. Or maybe he had been too wrapped up in his own world to notice. Either way, he had failed Ivan when it mattered most.

Till had written it off as stress, as Ivan being Ivan, too stubborn to admit he needed help. He had trusted Ivan's easy smiles and brushed-off reassurances because it was easier to believe they were fine than to dig deeper.

"Ivan's always been strong," Till had told himself. "He'll tell me if something's wrong."

But Ivan hadn't.

The guilt was suffocating.

Till thought back to the times Ivan had avoided eye contact when they spoke, the times he laughed just a little too loudly at jokes that weren't funny, the days he'd claimed he was too busy to hang out. Till had noticed, of course. He wasn't that oblivious. But he had let it slide, assuming Ivan would eventually come to him, as he always had in the past.

There was that night—a week ago—when Ivan had texted to say he couldn't make it to their group movie night. Till had felt a pang of worry but brushed it aside. "I'm just tired," Ivan had said. "Catch you next time."

And Till, preoccupied with his own plans, had replied, "Sure, next time."

But there was no next time.

The guilt was starting to become unbearable.

The last conversation they'd had replayed in Till's mind, over and over. Ivan had been sitting on the edge of his bed, fiddling with his phone as Till leaned against the doorway.

"You sure you don't want to come with us?" Till had asked, half-joking, half-serious.

"I'm good," Ivan replied. "You go ahead. I think I'm gonna stay in tonight."

Till raised an eyebrow, his gaze lingering on Ivan for a moment too long. But Ivan just waved him off, forcing a light chuckle.

"I'm fine. Really. You go ahead."

"Alright…" Till should have hesitated some more, should have pressed on the matter more. But no. Instead, he smiled and shrugged. "I'll bring you back something if you want. How about some sushi? Want some?"

At the time, he hadn't thought much of it. Ivan always had his moods, and Till had figured he'd bounce back like he always did.

But now, the memory felt like a knife twisting in his chest. Ivan had been asking for something—anything—and Till hadn't seen it.

Or worse, he had seen it and chosen to ignore it.

Now, as Till sat there, holding Ivan's still form, he thought of all the times he'd teased him, all the times he'd brushed off his subtle hints of distress.

He thought about how Ivan had been pulling away for months, and Till had done nothing.

Till's grip tightened around Ivan as tears streamed down his face.

He had always thought of himself as Ivan's protector—ever since he met him in the park, so small, so vulnerable, and so apathetic—he promised, swore, that he would protect him

To be the one who stood by him through thick and thin.

But when Ivan had needed him most, Till hadn't been there.

"I should've stayed," Till whispered, his voice breaking. "I should've stayed that night. I should've asked. I should've known."

His chest heaved with sobs as he pressed his forehead against Ivan's, his tears wetting the other's pale cheeks.

For the first time in his life, Till felt truly helpless.

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It wasn't until later, when he found Ivan's journal, that the full weight of the truth hit him.

Page after page revealed Ivan's thoughts, his fears, his quiet despair. And then, in one trembling entry, his unspoken feelings:

[Till is my light, but I know he'll never see me that way.]

Then another.

[I wish I could hate him for making me feel this way. But how could I hate the person who makes my world brighter, even if it's from a distance?]

And another.

[The petals come more often now, and it's getting harder to hide them. Till asked if I was okay today—I lied, of course. What else could I do?]

And finally,

[Till is the reason I've held on this long. But I can't keep pretending. I can't keep hoping for something that will never happen.]

Till's breath caught as he read the words. The journal slipped from his hands, landing on the floor with a dull thud. He stared at the pages, the meaning of the words sinking in.

Ivan had loved him.

And Till—Till had loved Ivan too.

He had loved him all along but had been too blind, too scared, to admit it.

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He thought of the time Ivan had smiled at him during a sunset, the way his eyes lit up when he laughed, the way his presence had always felt like home.

And now, that light is gone.

As the sun rose outside, casting a pale glow over the room, Till made a silent vow. He would carry this guilt, this love, for the rest of his life.

But it wasn’t enough. It would never be enough.

Because no matter what he did, he couldn’t bring Ivan back.

Till coughs, a small petal lightly falls down directly on the picture frame in his hand.

It felt poetic in a cruel way.

Ivan had loved him until his deathbed, and now Till will suffer the same fate.

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